

# Security guarding: a competency model

by Lindy-Lee Lubbe\* and Antoni Barnard\*\*

## Abstract

*This article reports on the findings of a qualitative interpretive study in which a competency framework was designed that would identify high-performing security officers in a small to medium Gauteng-based security company. Data were gathered through Repertory Grid and Behavioural Event interviews with eight subject matter experts, including five top-performing security officers, two managers and a client of the security company's. Disciplinary records were further scrutinised to add rigour to the data. Grounded-theory data analysis elicited nine competencies essential to success and efficiency in the role of a security officer. The nine competencies elicited were personal hygiene and general appearance, vigilance, integrity, language proficiency, teamwork, specialist knowledge, personal motivation, conscientiousness and interpersonal relationships.*

**Key words:** *competency, competence, competency modelling, qualitative research, grounded theory, repertory grid technique, behavioural event technique*

## 1 Introduction

Crime remains a prominent issue in South Africa. Despite continuing a downward trend in the 2010/11 financial year after peaking in 2002/03, the South African crime rate is still regarded as critical (Newham, Burger, Gould & Lancaster 2011; OSAC 2012). The total crime rate comprised 2 071 487 reported cases in 2010/11 (Newham et al 2011), with burglary of residential premises accounting for 247 630 reported cases in the 2011 crime statistics released by the SAPS (SAPS 2010/11). OSAC (2012) regards the 7 039 reported SAPS cases of home invasions in the Gauteng Province in 2011 as alarming and states that residential driveways are the most vulnerable point for South Africans.

Despite good policing practices (see Newham et al 2011), the SAPS and the Metropolitan Police Department still suffer from a lack of equipment, resources, training and personnel and are therefore unable to respond with sufficient capacity to the crime issue in South Africa (Mabudusha & Masiloane 2011; OSAC 2012). Moreover, the police culture of lack of accountability and poor management remains an issue of concern, as noted by Police Minister, Nathi Mthethwa (SAPA 2012). Inevitably, the private security industry has become a key performer in helping to deter and prevent crime in South Africa (Berg 2008; Mabudusha & Masiloane 2011; Potgieter, Ras & Nesar 2008; Singh 2008; Steenkamp & Potgieter 2004).

According to Singh (2008), in the South African context private security officers outnumbered police officers at the time by as much as 7:1. Scallan (2009) indicated that in 2009 there were 5 989 registered security companies and 339 343 registered

\* Ms L Lubbe is a student in the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of South Africa.

\*\* Prof HA Barnard is a professor in the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of South Africa.

security officers, about 180 000 of whom were active. The Private Security Industry of South Africa (PSIRA) Annual Report 2010/2011 reports 8 828 registered and active security businesses at the end of March 2011 (PSIRA 2010/2011). This rapid expansion in the private security industry resulted among other things from the withdrawal of the state from some policing functions, the extensive growth in private property, the inability of the police to protect private citizens and private security companies' ability to adjust more readily to changing consumer demands (Mabudusha & Masiloane 2011; Minnaar & Ngoveni 2004).

Globally it is predicted that the employment of security officers will grow by 18 percent between 2010 and 2020, which is considerably faster than the average for all occupations (Bureau of Labour Statistics 2012-13). The growth in the private security industry in South Africa follows a global trend which began in 1975 in America, followed by the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Bavaria and Switzerland (Levinson 2002). The growth has been such that the private security industry is seen as competing with national police services in some countries (Alain & Crête 2009). The evolution of the use of private security guards and security management has also been noted in African countries (Kasali 2011).

Regulation of private security businesses has become imperative (Berg 2008; Kasali 2011). In South Africa the private security industry is governed by PSIRA and falls under the Private Security Regulation Act 56 of 2001 (Berg 2008). The quality assurance function of all training conducted in the security industry falls under the auspices of the Sector Education and Training Authorities, specifically the Safety and Security Seta (SASSETA) (Pillay 2007). The focal point of training is on developing competence with regard to strategies and techniques for controlling, maintaining and preventing crime and loss of property (Singh 2008). The formalisation of training and education for security officers resulted in 53 unit standards for training in general security practices (SASSETA 2010), providing, cumulatively, a large number of educational assessment criteria across the 53 unit standards. The importance of regulation and training of the security industry have been noted by many (Alain & Crête 2009; Button 2011; Kasali 2011; Pillay 2007), yet selection practices in the security industry have not received adequate attention to date (Singh 2008).

In view of the lack of appropriate skills and competencies in employed security managers (Button 2011), the importance of training is clear, yet in our opinion a closer look at selection criteria also seems to be needed. Moreover, smaller private security companies lack adequate resources to formalise their recruitment and selection practices (Singh 2008) and thus run the risk of hiring criminals (see Potgieter et al 2008).

With regard to selection in general, Campion, Fink, Ruggenberg, Carr, Phillips and Odman (2011) emphasise a maximum of 12 competencies in a competency model for selection purposes as best practice in competency-based assessment. The educational assessment criteria linked to each of the 53 unit standards may therefore not prove effective for selecting security officers and there is a need for focused standardised benchmark criteria in the form of observable and measurable competencies for selecting security officers.

## **2 Aim of the study**

With the dire need for crime prevention in South Africa, the rapid growth in the private security industry and the lack of predetermined selection criteria for competent security officers, the objective of this research was to explore the critical competencies distinguishing effective and ineffective security officers for purposes of selection.

A literature review of competency-based assessment and competency modelling follows, after which the research design and methodology are explicated. Lastly, the findings of the study are presented.

### **3 Competency-based assessment**

In view of the significant value added to integrated human resource practices and organisational performance through competency-based selection and development approaches (Bartram 2004; Campion et al 2011; Heinsman, De Hoogh, Koopman & Van Muijen 2007; Potgieter & Van der Merwe 2002; Zhao & Du 2011), a competency-based approach was chosen as the primary theoretical perspective guiding this research.

#### **3.1 Competencies**

Competency/ies are defined as the underlying human characteristics distinctly affecting superior job performance in a specific work setting (Bakanauskiene & Martinkiene 2011; Bartram 2004; Boyatzis 1982; Heinsman et al 2007). Competency is not the behaviour or performance itself, but the collection of underlying capabilities available that potentially enables some individuals to meet work demands more effectively than others (Campion et al 2011) and these capabilities are distinctly job-related (Zhao & Du 2011). Underlying characteristics of a person may include knowledge, motives, personality traits, skills, abilities, behaviour and even aspects of an individual's self-image and social role (Boyatzis 1982; Heinsman et al 2007; Rothwell & Lindholm 1999; Zhao & Du 2011). Competencies reveal an individual's potential to meet demands in real-life and context-specific situations (Bakanauskiene & Martinkiene 2011; Koeppen, Hartig, Klieme & Leutner 2008; Lichtenberg et al 2007). In fact, to improve job performance and satisfaction, competencies have been widely used to match individuals to jobs by matching the competencies of a person with job requirements (Heinsman et al 2007). As opposed to competency, *competence* refers to a person's ability to perform at a specific minimum level required by job outcomes or goals (Brown 2006; Kurtz & Bartman 2002; Potgieter & Van der Merwe 2002). As Rowe (1995) explains, an individual cannot be partially competent, one is either competent or incompetent. Competency therefore provides the potential capability to be competent in relation to a specific goal or job task.

Competencies are furthermore defined in terms of observable behaviour that provides the organisation with sustainable competitive advantage (Campion et al 2011). Competencies therefore constitute observable human characteristics distinctive of performance in a job and are mostly defined in terms of behaviour (see also Heinsman et al 2007; Saunders 2002).

Considering the above, competency is defined here as a collation of observable and measurable person characteristics enabling performance in real-life and context-specific job-related situations. Such underlying person characteristics may include knowledge, skills, activities, capabilities, motives, traits, attitudes or behaviours and aspects of an individual's self-image or social role and are usually defined in behavioural terms.

#### **3.2 Competency profiling/ modelling**

According to Bartram (2004), competency profiling focuses on the essential behaviours required to perform in a particular job (person specification), whereas job analysis determines the actual tasks, roles and responsibilities associated with the job and

results in a job description (Sanchez & Levine 2009). A competency profile or model contains a written behavioural description of each of the essential competencies required to be successful in a particular job, workplace or organisational setting (Campion et al 2011; Lucia & Lepsinger 1999; Teodorescu 2006) and forms the basis of an equitable and fair selection strategy (Potgieter & Van der Merwe 2002; Saunders 2002).

McClelland, one of the pioneers in developing job-related competency models, stated the following (1973:1): "If you want to test who will be a good policeman, go find out what a policeman does. Follow him around, make a list of his activities, and sample from that list in screening applicants." Determining what people actually do in a specific work context therefore leads to identifying essential behaviour underlying superior performance (Lucia & Lepsinger 1999; Rowe 1995). Some strategies employed to collect data when compiling a competency profile include observations, focus groups and subject matter expert interviews (Campion et al 2011; Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999), which are congruent to qualitative research methodology. Campion et al (2011) highlight the use of more novel approaches such as structured brainstorming techniques and behavioural event interviews with subject matter experts.

Although generic organisational competency models are quite useful (Delamare le Deist & Winterton 2005; Mansfield 1996), job-specific competency models can be more efficiently applied to human resource practices such as selection and development (Lucia & Lepsinger 1999; Mansfield 1996). Thus, a thoroughly tailored approach (see Rothwell & Lindholm 1999) was used in the competency modelling process for this study, with the aim of enhancing fairness and efficiency in the selection process of security officers, specifically in the small to medium private security business context.

## **4 Research design**

### **4.1 Research approach**

Because this is a qualitative study, an interpretive approach was deemed appropriate to the overall explanatory and descriptive purpose of the study (see Johnson & Duberley 2000; Locke 2001). Relying on both phenomenological and hermeneutic assumptions stemming from the interpretive research orientation, this study acknowledges the need to rely on the participants' lived context-specific experience and constructed meaning (phenomenology: insider perspective) while also applying a critical integration with legitimate resources (in this case competency-based assessment literature) external to the research phenomenon context (ie hermeneutic orientation).

This study explored the distinguishing skills, attributes and behaviour of a security officer by analysing subject matter experts' understanding of efficient and inefficient security officers. Not only did this study explore the competencies needed; it also described and defined the competencies in a competency framework for the purposes of contributing to more efficient selection strategies in small to medium private security businesses.

### **4.2 Research strategy**

In order to derive a tailored approach to competency design, the study focused on a specific case, namely a small to medium sized private security company specialising in security services to protect and safeguard people and property. Congruent to an interpretive orientation, a systematic grounded theory methodology (see Cooney 2011;

Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Hunter, Murphy, Grealish, Casey & Keady 2011; Johnson & Duberley 2000; Lempert 2007; Locke 2001) was employed for data analysis.

### **4.3 Research method**

#### *Research context*

The research company is privately owned and Gauteng based. It has been rendering private security services for five years. It is a small to medium sized company, employing at most 80 guards at a given time.

#### *Sampling*

Owing to the context-specific nature of the study, purposeful sampling (Morse 2007) was used in identifying information-rich participants (also referred to as subject matter experts) with regard to the phenomenon under study. Management was requested to provide the names of their most outstanding security officers. Five security officers from this list participated in the study. True to the grounded theory approach, sampling was guided by the principle of theory building, and data collection proceeded up to saturation point, with no new themes emerging (see Dey 2007; Glaser 2001; LaRossa 2005; Morse 2007). When it became clear that no new themes were emerging from the interviews with security officers it was decided to explore additional perspectives on the phenomenon. Two managers and a client of the security company's were then also approached and included in the study. In terms of diversity the participating security officers were all black males, aged between 25 and 40 and were level C security officers, which is typical of the employment population. Diversity was therefore only attained in terms of age and by including the managers (one white female and one white male) and the customer, who was a white male.

#### *Data gathering*

Interviews seem to be the method of choice from a competency-based perspective (Campion et al 2011; Lucia & Lepsinger 1999) and are also typical of grounded theory studies (Hood 2007). Semi-structured and in-depth interviews with subject matter experts were employed to elicit essential competencies in protecting and safeguarding people and property. To enhance objectivity while still striving for rigour, the repertory grid technique (Fransella, Bell & Bannister 2004; Jankowics 2004) and the behavioural event technique (McClelland 1998) were applied in organising the interviews. The repertory grid technique is derived from Kelly's Personal Construct Theory and is a particularly useful semi-structured interviewing technique used to elicit conscious as well as tacit experience and knowledge from subject matter experts (Lemke, Clark & Wilson 2011). The repertory grid technique enhances construct validity in that it helps to articulate constructs in the authentic experience of the subject matter experts (Goffin & Koners 2011), which aligns with the phenomenological orientation of the study. The repertory grid technique was applied in interviews with security officers. At each interview two names were drawn from the list of employed security officers and participants were first asked to identify the more competent security officer of the two. Participants were then asked "what distinguishes the one security officer from the other in their job" and were probed to clarify the discussion that followed. This process was repeated several times in an interview.

The behavioural event interview is an in-depth interviewing technique that is particularly beneficial to competency modelling in collecting detailed job-related information, usually from senior or executive managers (Campion et al 2011). It was

therefore decided to use the behavioural event technique in interviews with the two managers and the client. Two of the core questions asked and then probed were: "What behaviour distinguishes a good/ efficient security officer?" and "Can you describe a situation which exemplifies the behaviour of an efficient security officer?"

Rigorous data collection was further facilitated by analysing the company's disciplinary records for the two years prior to the current date. In this period disciplinary action was taken against 25 employees, all of whom were male and ranged between 30 and 40 years of age. Although a competency model contains mostly definitions of positive competencies (Cooper 2000), the practice of studying defiant behaviour and converting these characteristics to positive traits is regarded as useful in compiling a competency model or framework for selection purposes (Cooper 2000; Saunders 2002).

#### *Data capturing and storage*

All the interviews were audio-taped and were transcribed by the primary researcher, thereby facilitating immersion in the data. Interviews were conducted over a period of four months.

#### *Data analysis*

This study borrowed from the competency design approaches proposed by Lucia and Lepsinger (1999), Cooper (2000) and Saunders (2002), which when combined produced a similar systematic approach to data collection and analysis to the approach used in Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory. The data were ultimately analysed using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) systematic grounded theory approach. After a process of constant comparison during the grounded theory phases of open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Creswell & Maietta 2002; Strauss & Corbin 1998), the final theoretical product (see Locke 2001), namely the proposed competency framework, emerged. In following this approach, the raw data obtained from the interviews and the disciplinary records were analysed manually, first through a line-by-line colour-coding of each data record, and compared for similarities and differences (see Hunter et al 2011; Strauss & Corbin 1998; Urquhart 2007). Similarly labelled codes were indicated by the same colour (see also Boyatzis 1982; Calloway & Knapp 1995; Goulding 2005).

Once codes started recurring it was possible to create categories of codes and ascribe meaning to these. After the data had been separated into different components through open coding, the components were reassembled in new ways by connecting categories of codes (Strauss & Corbin 1998) and thus overarching themes started to emerge from the data. During selective coding, these overarching themes were further collapsed to denote the main theme or story line that underlies the research phenomenon and research objective by constantly comparing the interpreted concepts with the research objective in mind (see Jones & Noble 2007).

Although a literature review had been conducted in the initial planning stages of the study, further literature analysis was carried out during the later stages of data analysis during which data were compared with similar competency constructs from the literature. During the coding of data and the literature review, conceptual notes or memo's (see Hunter et al 2011; Lempert 2007) were written to elucidate meanings derived from the iterative analysis process. Through constant comparison of the literature with data incidents and conceptual notes, nine themes were finally extracted and conceptualised as the key competencies distinguishing an efficient security officer working in the area of protection and safeguarding of people and property.

### *Assuring ethical and quality research*

Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and each consented in writing to participate (see Christians 2000). The consent form stated the reason for the study and emphasised freedom of participation, confidentiality and anonymity. The storage of raw data (consent forms, transcriptions and audio-recordings of the study) for a five-year period also adds to the ethical profile of the study.

Triangulation adds to the credibility of data (Lincoln & Guba 2000; Terre Blanche & Kelly 2004) and was achieved by collecting data from different sources, namely disciplinary records and interviews with subject matter experts from different perspectives (security officers, managers and the customer). Hunter et al (2011) refer to this as methodological rigour and it was facilitated by the principle of theoretical sampling guiding analytical decisions to a point of confirmed saturation of themes.

In grounded theory rigour is enhanced by cross-checking concepts against participants' meanings, validating findings by consulting expert opinion and keeping a detailed record of all analytical and sampling decisions (Cooney 2011). Rigour and credibility of the study were pursued by establishing an audit trail of the research data through audio-recordings and transcriptions as well as by making extensive field notes on issues affecting sampling decisions, on how interpretations were made and on decisions made during data analysis, using these records in further data gathering and finally checking data interpretations against the literature. The results of the data analysis were submitted to the research participants for confirmatory review as well as to the management and customer experts. The final competency framework was presented to and accepted by management as a true reflection of the essential competencies required for efficient security officers in their small to medium security business environment.

## **5 Results**

After merging the themes from the data records, concepts continued to evolve through integration of the themes with other relevant theoretical sources (see Dick 2007; Urquhart 2007). Data were compared with security competencies listed in the O\*NET OnLine occupational database under the detailed report for security officers (updated 2010). Competency definitions were further refined through comparison with similar competency constructs in the literature. The following is a discussion and verification of the themes that were abstracted from the data.

### **5.1 *Personal hygiene and general appearance***

Personal hygiene, cleanliness, neatness in appearance and pride in personal attire were mentioned by a number of participants as distinctive of a good security officer. Research Participant (RP) 6 emphasised neatness and tidiness: *"looking smart and clean in his uniform; he must appear clean and he is always tidy"*. Being dirty and untidy was highlighted by RP2 as an indication of an inefficient officer: *"When people come here, I think they look at us and want to see something from us, but when they look [at] you and find something dirty ..."*. Similarly, RP2 spoke of a poorly performing security officer not wearing his *"proper uniform"*, and said that *"he's not that person who likes cleaning himself, he doesn't like water, water I think, is something like the enemy"*. Presentability in general appearance was also evident from the disciplinary records. One disciplinary case described the counter-productiveness of *"not [being] properly dressed; improper dress attire and the dress code breached"*.

Although clothing is generally regarded as a form of nonverbal communication and seen as being representative of characteristics inherent in an individual (Johnson, Schofield & Yurchisin 2002), general appearance has been particularly noted in the context of security services. In addition to the general training requirements for security officers explained in section 3 of the Security Officers Act of 1987, Pillay (2007) recommends including a module in personal hygiene and general appearance. Johnson, Yoo, Kim and Lennon (2008) found that when security guards were dressed in uniform they had a greater influence on the behaviour of others than when they were dressed in conventional clothing. Kummen and Brown (1985) identified four aspects indicative of quality security services, among which were smartness and tidiness of dress.

## 5.2 Vigilance

Vigilance was referred to by participants as the quality of being inquisitive, observant and proactive in accepting responsibility for preventing and deterring crime. RP7 emphasised the need for security officers to always question what they see, consistently asking *“why, why, why are those people sitting in the car?”* Vigilance in the sense of being watchful and alert was emphasised by RP6: *“security needs to see exactly what is going on”* with *“eyes wide open to see where the danger is coming from and to do something about it”*. Being proactive was described as involving continuous checking and patrolling, being visible and investigating if there was anything suspicious, as noted by RP8: *“looking at gaps in the fences, making yourself visible...”* and RP6: *“a person must be able to see a problem coming and then to take the necessary action, like phoning the supervisor, phoning the management ...”*. RP2 explained: *“A good officer must always check the time and do the patrolling at that particular time.”* Another participant (RP4) reiterated that: *“My job is to check all the places and patrol the whole building. That meaning, I must check all, let us say we go outside, we must check all next to the fence, check that all the fence are oraait, let us say windows are open, we must close them ...”*

Being vigilant was also recorded by the Bureau of Labour Statistics (2012-13), which stated that a security officer needs to be mentally alert with razor-sharp observation skills. Quick reflexes are also emphasised because security officers may be required to detain people until law-enforcement officers arrive (Bureau of Labour Statistics 2012-13). Similarly, the O\*NET OnLine detailed report on security officers' abilities (2010:3) includes a reference to vigilant behaviour:

*the ability to tell when something is wrong or is likely to go wrong; the ability to identify or detect a known pattern (a figure, object, word or sound) that is hidden in other distracting material; the ability to detect or tell the differences between sounds that vary in pitch and loudness; the ability to see details at a distance.*

## 5.3 Integrity

Integrity in this context refers to honesty and the ability to distinguish right from wrong, as noted by RP8: *“not covering for somebody else doing something wrong, if he sees somebody stealing and doing things that's contrary to what he knows is right he must take the necessary action ...”*. Integrity also relates to trustworthiness, as stated by RP6: *“he must firstly be trustworthy ... he mustn't steal or help syndicates steal in the place”*. The behavioural competency model of the University of Notre Dame (2009) defines integrity as demonstrating honesty, ethical behaviour and high moral standards,



as well as being widely trusted, respectful and honourable. Both honesty and trustworthiness are noted by Barnard (2011) as essential competencies of integrity.

#### **5.4 Language proficiency**

Language proficiency was described by RP6 as the ability of a security officer to “converse on the telephone ... express himself and his thoughts properly” in the country’s most widely used official language in business, which is English. Inefficiency was linked to poor verbal proficiency by RP8: “He is unable to express himself while speaking on a cellphone or intercom.” This theme was confirmed by O\*NET OnLine (2010), where reading comprehension, spelling, grammar and speaking fluently (conveying information to others effectively) are highlighted as important skills for a security officer. The importance of written communication was also underlined by the necessity for the security officer to be able to write well and express himself when writing a report. In this regard RP3 commented, “the ‘OB’ is the book that if I find something I write it down, something wrong I write it down, yes. So if I make a round I find that the window is open I try then to close that window and write it down the time and date and then I report to the office.” The Bureau of Labour Statistics (2012-13) also emphasises security guards’ verbal and written abilities to document suspicious behaviour consistently. Language proficiency in this context therefore includes verbal and written communication, which denotes the ability to write and speak clearly, applying appropriate, understandable grammar, syntax and language style (Saville & Holdsworth 1996) in order to convey the message to the audience it is intended for.

#### **5.5 Teamwork**

In the context of the findings, working in a team relates to being able to work with other people harmoniously, interacting with others and relating well to a wide variety of people. The Commonwealth of Virginia’s guidelines on developing competency-based systems (2002:19) define teamwork as the “collaboration and cooperation of a group of employees to combine their talents to get the job done”, which includes a positive attitude towards team members. RP3 described an efficient security officer in the following terms: “This one has a positive behaviour, he works with people nicely, he doesn’t fight with them.” RP4 said in reference to a security officer who was not able to work in a team context: “This guy is so cheeky, he disagrees with everyone, doesn’t want to work with people oraait. Every time we tell him to do this, he disagrees and that is not how it’s supposed to be.” Saunders (2002) emphasises constructive conflict handling as part of one’s interpersonal repertoire, an ability that we have classified as part of teamwork in this context. RP7 referred to a poorly performing colleague as posing a challenge to teamwork in that he “stirs amongst the people”. Disciplinary records also reveal incidents where security officers assaulted one another and/or threatened one another. Saville and Holdsworth (1994) define teamwork in their competency model as cooperating with others in the pursuit of team goals by sharing information and supporting one another and O\*Net OnLine (2010) emphasises that security guarding requires displaying a good-natured and cooperative attitude, and being understanding and helpful on the job.

#### **5.6 Specialist knowledge**

Specialist knowledge starts with going through the training process as stipulated by the Private Security Industry Regulation Act 56 of 2001 and receiving PSIRA accreditation.

Specialist knowledge includes being qualified and able to perform officer duties, as described by RP8: *“be well qualified, in other words it is no use having PSIRA qualification, he must be able to prove that he can do what PSIRA requires ...”*. In analysing the disciplinary records it became evident that patrolling, which is the method of guarding employed in this company, along with being vigilant and observant, is taken very seriously. The company gives strict instructions on when to patrol and how to patrol and this process is managed by a tracking device that the security officer carries on his person. Boyatzis (1982) refers to specialised knowledge as knowledge that must be practical, relevant and usable information on the job. Saville and Holdsworth (1994, 1996) describe technical skill and competence as demonstrating detailed job-relevant knowledge and expertise and keeping abreast of new information in the area of specialisation. Findings on specialist knowledge in this study highlight specific knowledge and demonstrated competence in patrolling buildings, monitoring of access to secured sites and general guarding requirements.

### **5.7 Personal motivation**

Personal motivation in this study was divided into a passionate attitude to work and a sense of commitment. RP2, for example, stated that *“whatever I do, I think I’ll do with my whole heart”* and *“I like my job”*. RP6 believed that personal motivation is reflected in the commitment to continuous self-development in relation to the job: *“a person who is like a sponge, he asks questions and wants to learn, he wants to develop”*. Efficiency in the security context was described by RP7 in the following terms: *“some of the guards are walking the extra mile”*. Monk (2001) refers to personal motivation as a competency that includes drive and a sense of responsibility in getting to work and being punctual or arriving early on duty. In their managerial competency framework Saville and Holdsworth (1996) refer to personal motivation as being enthusiastic and committed to working hard in achieving goals. Taking the disciplinary records into consideration, motivation is reflected as an essential competency in the security context as disciplinary cases revolved around being absent without leave, reporting late for duty, leaving the allocated site without informing the supervisor or management, sleeping on duty, being under the influence of liquor while on duty, not patrolling as instructed or failing to patrol, arriving at work late or not contacting the office when absent. Responses from the respondents, which reflected a negative sense of responsibility, included security officers *“not worrying about whoever is going to take over from them to protect the property which can have millions of rands worth of equipment, they just ignore that and stay away”* (RP8) and *“there’s a sense they can stay away for 10 days and then they expect to come back and to be re-employed and to carry on with their normal things”* (RP7).

### **5.8 Conscientiousness**

Adherence to company rules and regulations was confirmed by RP7 as essential in a good security officer (*“must be obedient to the rules that we give him to do ...”*). Hattings (2006:165) defines following instructions and procedures as a competency, speaking of *“following instructions and procedures, adhering to schedules and ideas and demonstrating commitment to the organisation”*. In emphasising the importance of adhering to company rules and regulations, RP3 says: *“the ‘OB’ is the book that if I find something I write it down... so if I find that the window is open I try then to close that window and write it down the time and date and then I report to the office ... If I see*

*there is a hole to the fence I [am] supposed to phone to the supervisor or to the office, yes to tell them."*

Another respondent (RP8) also referred to disobeying rules and regulations: *"the relieving officer hasn't pitched up yet, there are two ways of doing it he can just sit and protect the other person not doing anything about it, although there are instructions that tell them exactly what to do they ignore that because they want to cover up" and "to come to work if they know they are not going to be there to do something about it, they just basically stay away ..."*. In this extract taking responsibility for your actions also emerges as a clear aspect of being conscientious and rule-bound.

O\*NET OnLine (2010) refers to knowledge of relevant equipment, policies, procedures and strategies to promote effective security operations. Knowledge pertaining to safety and security issues explains why the competency of following instructions and procedures is important. In this company creativity is not encouraged but adhering to company rules and regulations is. In the themes extracted from the disciplinary records it became evident that when rules and regulations are not adhered to, the security of the clients' premises is placed at risk.

### **5.9 Interpersonal relationships**

In this study interpersonal relationships were divided into management relationships and client relationships. Management relationships were explained as having respect for superiors, demonstrated in the way the security officer addresses his superiors by conversing in *"a proper tone and not being rude"* (RP8). The importance of good management relationships was also reflected in the disciplinary records, which reported that security officers had been guilty of intimidation, impudence, insolence and gross insubordination towards superiors.

Client relationships relate to the way the security officer approaches the client, the way in which he speaks and the way he addresses clients. O\*NET OnLine (2010) confirms that the ability to maintain good client relationships is essential to a good security officer, and refers to it as a social skill which includes actively looking for ways to assist clients. RP2 suggests that the security officer should *"respect the client"* by handling *"the people the way that the other person can feel good, he's accepted by this officer"*. The importance of maintaining a professional relationship with clients is evident in the description of a poor performer by RP6: *"this person is talking too much he is overfriendly"*.

## **6 Discussion**

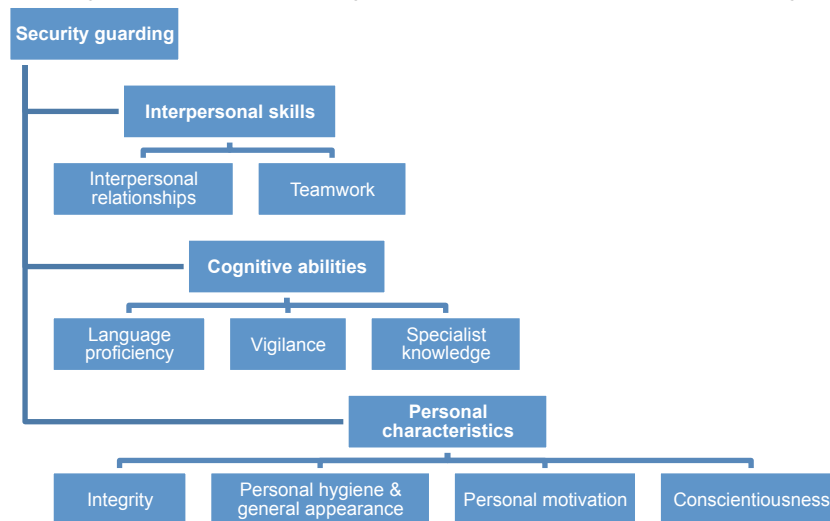
The objective of this research was to explore the critical competencies that distinguish effective security officers in the small to medium private security industry. The research objective was achieved through a qualitative exploration of subject matter experts' lived experience and as a result a competency framework was proposed as a benchmark for selection practices in the industry. In order to enhance the competitive advantage of small to medium security companies in particular, a systematic, scientifically based research approach to competency modelling was applied utilising semi-structured repertory grid and in-depth behavioural event interviewing techniques in consultation with various subject matter experts. Disciplinary records were consulted and data analysed with the aid of grounded theory. From an integration of the data and theory from existing competency definitions, the nine competency definitions are summarised in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**  
**Competency definitions for security officers**

Competency	Competency definitions
<b>Personal hygiene and general appearance</b>	Displaying a presentable general appearance in attire and in personal hygiene by looking neat and clean.
<b>Vigilance</b>	The tendency to be inquisitive, mentally alert and observant of hidden and obvious patterns in the surroundings by proactively noting and investigating irregularities and suspicious observations.
<b>Integrity</b>	The ability to distinguish right from wrong and consequently display honesty and trustworthiness by being truthful, straightforward and candid as well as reliable in terms of work behaviour.
<b>Language proficiency</b>	Being able to communicate clearly in English by conveying a message or facts in a manner that it is understood by the audience it is intended for. And the ability to read and write basic English security reports that are easy to follow and understand.
<b>Teamwork</b>	A tendency to cooperate with others in pursuit of team goals through helpful and supportive behaviour, resolving conflict constructively and sharing information with team members.
<b>Specialist knowledge</b>	PSIRA qualification accompanied by demonstrated job-relevant skills and knowledge of the duties of a security officer as well as the potential to continuously learn and keep abreast of new knowledge.
<b>Personal motivation</b>	Displaying an energetic, enthusiastic and committed attitude towards work and a personal interest in the work of a security officer.
<b>Conscientiousness</b>	Adhering to company policy, superior instructions and rules and regulations and demonstrating responsibility for own actions.
<b>Interpersonal relationships</b>	Interacting with managers and clients in a respectful, professional and helpful manner, without being overfriendly or intimidating.

Clustering the competencies derived from the data into personal characteristics, cognitive abilities and interpersonal skills produced the proposed final competency framework for security officers working in a small to medium sized Gauteng security company which is shown in Figure 1 below:

**Figure 1**  
**A competency framework for security officers in a small to medium security company**



## **7 Conclusions, implications and recommendations**

### **7.1 Conclusions and implications**

In view of the qualitative nature of the study and the small sample, the results have a limited claim to generalisability. The contextual nature of a qualitative study may, however, allow for claims of transferability to similar contexts provided that the research context was clearly explicated (Mertens & McLaughlin 2004) and purposive and theoretical sampling was applied (Silverman 2000). This study therefore makes a potentially valuable contribution to the field of human resource practice in the small to medium private security industry, by proposing a competency framework that distinguishes efficient security officers in this context. The nine competencies elicited from this study contribute to the application of a substantiated theoretical competency framework for the selection of security officers in the small to medium private security industry. A focused competency framework provides the basis for designing cost-effective and reliable selection practices (see Potgieter & Van der Merwe 2002; Saunders 2002) to select potentially efficient security officers. If a competency-based approach to the assessment of security officers is initiated, selection procedures are aligned with South African labour legislation and may therefore guide the use of selection methods that are culturally fair, practical and relevant to the job (see Potgieter & Van der Merwe 2002).

### **7.2 Recommendations**

Given the context-specific purpose of this study, opportunities exist for future research to address some of the inherent limitations. Firstly, the validation of the proposed competency framework was outside the exploratory and descriptive scope of this research. An opportunity exists to empirically test the validity of the competencies for selection purposes. In order to identify those individuals likely to succeed in the profession, it is recommended that the competency framework be operationalised in a selection battery consisting of appropriate cognitive, personality and behavioural assessment measures. Assessment data should then be compared with existing predictors of success such as results from performance appraisal interviews and/or successful completion of on-the-job training programmes. Secondly, because the findings may not be generalised to all security sectors, similar studies or verification studies may be conducted to build on the knowledge of competencies required for effective security guarding in the private sector.

The study has practical value for current human resource practices in the research organisation. The competency framework forms a potentially valuable basis for an assessment centre to be compiled for selection purposes. Assessment exercises that include cognitive, personality and behavioural measures (see Potgieter & Van der Merwe 2002) as well as competency-based interview questions can be developed to assess the fit between potential employees and the core competencies required for the specific job (see Carroll & McCrackin 1998; Grigoryev 2006). Furthermore, it is recommended that the competencies identified as being critical for selection purposes should be integrated into the current performance appraisal system. In so doing, a set standard can be maintained after the selection process has been completed (see Carroll & McCrackin 1998).

A Canadian perspective by Alain and Crête (2009) highlights the importance of continuous training if security businesses are to remain competitive. We hope this article has highlighted the value of developing sound assessment criteria as a further

proactive human resource strategy, to ensure the selection of appropriate potential in private security companies.

## List of references

- Alain, M & Crête, C. 2009. Continuous training as a subject of negotiations in public and private policing. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management* 32(1):75-91.
- Bakanauskiene, I & Martinkiene, J. 2011. Determining managerial competencies of management professionals. *Management of Organizations: Systematic Research* 60:29-43.
- Barnard, A. 2011. The competencies of integrity. *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 21(2):267-274.
- Bartram, D. 2004. Assessment in organisations. *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 53(2):237-259.
- Berg, J. 2008. Holding South Africa's private security industry accountable: Mechanisms of control and challenges to oversight. *Acta Criminologica* 21(1):87-96.
- Boyatzis, RE. 1982. *The competent manager*. New York: Wiley.
- Brown, T. 2006. Stop competency blunders. *Training and Development* 60(1):20-22.
- Bureau of Labour Statistics, US Department of Labor. 2012. *Occupational outlook handbook, 2012-13 edition. Security guards and gaming surveillance officers*. Available at: <http://www.stats.bls.gov/ooh/protective-service/security-guards.htm> (accessed on 11 April 2012).
- Button, M. 2011. The Private Security Industry Act 2001 and the security management gap in the United Kingdom. *Security Journal* 24(2):118-132.
- Calloway, L & Knapp, CA. 1995. Using grounded theory to interpret interviews. NY: School of Computer Science and Information Systems, Pace University. Available at: <http://csis.pace.edu/~knapp/AIS95.htm> (accessed on 15 June 2010).
- Campion, MA, Fink, A, Ruggeberg, BJ, Carr, L, Phillips, G & Odman, RB. 2011. Doing competencies well: Best practices in competency modelling. *Personnel Psychology* 64(1):225-262.
- Carroll, A & McCrackin, J. 1998. The competent use of competency-based strategies for selection and development. *Performance Improvement Quarterly* 11(3):45-63.
- Christians, CG. 2000. Ethics and politics in qualitative research, in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by NK Denzin & YS Lincoln. Thousand Oaks: Sage:133-155.
- Commonwealth of Virginia. 2002. Guidelines for developing competency-based systems. Virginia: Department of Human Resource Management. Available at: <http://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/compreform/crabs/crabs3/d.pdf> (accessed on 27 October 2009).
- Cooney, A. 2011. Rigour and grounded theory. *Nurse Researcher* 18(4):17-22.
- Cooper, KC. 2000. *Effective competency modelling & reporting: A step-by-step guide for improving individual & organisational performance*. New York: AMA Publications.
- Creswell, JW & Maitetta, RC. 2002. Qualitative Research, in *Handbook of research design & social measurement*, 6th edition, edited by DC Miller & NJ Salkind. Thousand Oaks: Sage:143-197.

- Delamare le Deist, F & Winterton, J. 2005. What Is competence? *Human Resource Development International* 8(1):27-46.
- Denzin, NK & Lincoln, YS. 2000. *Handbook of qualitative research*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Dey, I. 2007. Grounding categories, in *The Sage handbook of grounded theory*, edited by A Bryant & K Charmaz. London: Sage:167-190.
- Dick, B. 2007. What can grounded theorists and action researchers learn from each other? in *The Sage handbook of grounded theory*, edited by A Bryant & K Charmaz. London: Sage:298-416.
- Fransella, F, Bell, R & Bannister, D. 2004. *A manual for repertory grid technique*. 2nd edition. England: Wiley.
- Glaser, B. 2001. *The grounded theory perspective: Conceptualization contrasted with description*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Goffin, K & Koners, U. 2011, Tacit knowledge, lessons learnt and new product development. *Journal of Product Innovation Management* 28(2):300-318.
- Goulding, C. 2005. Grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenology: A comparative analysis of three qualitative strategies for marketing research. *European Journal of Marketing* 39(3/4):294-309.
- Grigoryev, P. 2006. Hiring by competency models. *The Journal for Quality & Participation* 29(4):16-18.
- Hattingh, M. 2006. Competency design: The construct validity of a competency modelling method. Unpublished MCom dissertation, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Heinsman, H, De Hoogh, AHB, Koopman, PL & Van Muijen, JJ. 2007. Competencies through the eyes of psychologists: A closer look at assessing competencies. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment* 15(4):412-427.
- Hood, JC. 2007. Orthodoxy vs. power: The defining traits of grounded theory, in *The Sage handbook of grounded theory*, edited by A Bryant & K Charmaz. London: Sage:151-164.
- Hunter, A, Murphy, K, Grealish, A, Casey, D & Keady, J. 2011. Navigating the grounded theory terrain, part 2. *Nurse Researcher* 19(1):6-11.
- Jankowics, D. 2004. *The easy guide to repertory grids*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Johnson, KKP, Schofield, NA & Yurchisin, J. 2002. Appearance and dress as a source of information: A qualitative approach to data collection. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 20(3):125-137.
- Johnson, KKP, Yoo, J, Kim, M & Lennon, SJ. 2008. Dress and human behavior: A review and critique. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 6(1):3-22.
- Johnson, P & Duberley, J. 2000. *Understanding Management Research: An introduction to epistemology*. London: Sage.
- Jones, R & Noble, G. 2007. Grounded theory and management research: A lack of integrity? *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal* 2(2):84-103.
- Kasali, MA. 2011. Analysing the evolution of private security guards and their limitations to security management in Nigeria. *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies* 5(1/2):32-48.

- Koeppen, K, Hartig, J, Klieme, E & Leutner, D. 2008. Current issues in competence modeling and assessment. *Journal of Psychology* 216(2):61-73.
- Kummen, ME & Brown, SA. 1985. Clothing as a cue in person perception: A review. *Canadian Home Economics Journal* 35:140-144.
- Kurtz, R & Bartman, D. 2002. Competency and individual performance: Modelling the world of work, in *Organizational effectiveness: The role of psychology*, edited by IT Robertson, M Callinan & D Bartman. New York: Wiley:227–255.
- LaRossa, R. 2005. Grounded theory methods and qualitative family research. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67(4):837-857.
- Lemke, F, Clark, M & Wilson, H. 2011. Customer experience quality: An exploration in business and consumer contexts using repertory grid technique. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 39(6):846-869.
- Lempert, LB. 2007. Asking questions of the data: Memo writing in the grounded theory tradition, in *The Sage handbook of grounded theory*, edited by A Bryant & K Charmaz. London: Sage:245-264.
- Levinson, D. 2002. *Encyclopedia of Crime and Punishment*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Lichtenberg, JW, Portnoy, SM, Bebeau, MJ, Leigh, IW, Nelson, PD, Rubin, NJ, Smith, IL & Kaslow NJ. 2007. Challenges to the assessment of competence and competencies. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice by the American Psychological Association* 38(5):474-478.
- Lincoln, YS & Guba, EG. 2000. Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences, in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edition, edited by NK Denzin & YS Lincoln. Thousand Oaks: Sage:163-188.
- Locke, K. 2001. *Grounded theory in management research*. London: Sage.
- Lucia, AD & Lepsinger, R. 1999. *The art and science of competency models*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mabudusha, A & Masiloane, D. 2011. The involvement of private security in policing: Police recognising their limitations. *Acta Criminologica* 24(3):114-122.
- Mansfield, RS. 1996. Building competency models: Approaches for HR professionals. *Human Resource Management* 35(1):7-18.
- McClelland, DC. 1973. Testing for competence rather than for intelligence. *American Psychologist* 38(1):1-14.
- McClelland, MC. 1998. Identifying competencies with behavioural-event interviews. *Psychological Science* 9(5):331-339. (Final editing by DG Winter, J Larrere & M Nathan after the death of MC McClelland on 27 March 1998.)
- Mertens, DM & McLaughlin, JA. 2004. *Research and evaluation methods in special education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Minnaar, A & Ngoveni, P. 2004. The relationship between the South African Police Service and the private security industry: Any role for outsourcing in the prevention of crime? *Acta Criminologica* 17(1):42-65.
- Monk, AL. 2001. The development of a competency model for auditors working in a professional services environment. Unpublished MCom dissertation, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Morse, JM. 2007. Sampling in grounded theory, in *The Sage handbook of grounded theory*, edited by A Bryant & K Charmaz. London: Sage:227-244.



- Newham, G, Burger, J, Gould C & Lancaster, L. 2011. Fact Sheet: Explaining the official crime statistics for 2010/2011. The Crime and Justice Programme: Institute for Security Studies. Available at <http://www.iss.co.za/pgcontent.php?UID=31074> (accessed on 26 June 2012).
- Notre Dame University. 2009. *Online performance management*. Belmont: Notre Dame University Human Resources Office. Available at: [https://hr.nd.edu/assets/19479/exempt\\_instructional\\_guide\\_steps\\_3\\_4.pdf](https://hr.nd.edu/assets/19479/exempt_instructional_guide_steps_3_4.pdf) (accessed on 8 April 2012).
- O\*Net OnLine. 2010. *Occupational database details report for 33-9032.00 – Security Guards*. National Center for O\*NET Development/ U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Available at: <http://www.onetcenter.org/link/details/33-9032.00> (accessed on 7 April 2012).
- OSAC, 2012. *South Africa 2012 OSAC crime and safety report*. US Bureau of Diplomatic Security. Available at: <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportPDF.aspx?cid=12014> (accessed on 26 June 2012).
- Pillay, K. 2007. Introducing unit-standards-based education and training methodology for security practitioners: A South African perspective. *Acta Criminologica* 20(4): 61-72.
- Potgieter, PJ, Ras, JM & Nesor, JJ. 2008. Can private security stand up to the challenge of crime and crime prevention in South Africa? A contemporary perspective. *Acta Criminologica* 21(1):33-43.
- Potgieter, TE & Van der Merwe, RP. 2002. Assessment in the workplace: A competency-based approach. *SA Journal of Industrial psychology* 28(1):60-66.
- Private Security Regulation Act 56 of 2001. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- PSIRA. 2010/2011. *Annual report*. Available at [http://www.psira.co.za/joomla/pdfs/PSIRA\\_AR-20102011.pdf](http://www.psira.co.za/joomla/pdfs/PSIRA_AR-20102011.pdf) (accessed on 26 June 2012).
- Rothwell, WJ & Lindholm, JE. 1999. Competency identification, modelling and assessment in the USA. *International Journal of Training and Development* 3(2):90-105.
- Rowe, C. 1995. Clarifying the use of competence and competency models in recruitment, assessment and staff development. *Industrial and Commercial Training* 27(11):12-17.
- Sanchez, JI & Levine, EL. 2009. What is (or should be) the difference between competency modelling and traditional job analysis? *Human Resource Management Review* 19(2):53-63.
- SAPA. 2012. SAPS inherited problems. *iAfrica News Online*. Wednesday, 30 May 2012. Available at: <http://news.iafrica.com/sa/797112.html>. (accessed on 27 June 2012).
- SAPS. 2010/2011. *Crime report 2010/2011: The crime challenge facing the South African police service*. Available at: <http://www.saps.gov.za/statistics/report/crimestats/2011/crime-situation-sa.pdf> (accessed on 26 June 2012).
- SASSETA. 2010. *Learning programmes guide*. Johannesburg: Safety and Security Sector Education and Training Authority. Available at: [http://www.sassetta.org.za/content/tinymce/plugins/openfile/uploads/files/downloads/Learning%20Guide%20Book\\_CD.pdf](http://www.sassetta.org.za/content/tinymce/plugins/openfile/uploads/files/downloads/Learning%20Guide%20Book_CD.pdf) (accessed on 26 June 2012).

- Saunders, E. 2002. *Assessing Human Competence: Practical guideline for the South African manager*. Randburg: Knowres.
- Saville & Holdsworth. 1994. *Perspectives on management competencies: User's manual*. Surrey, UK: Saville & Holdsworth.
- Saville & Holdsworth. 1996. *Inventory of management competencies: IMC manual and user's guide supplement*. Surrey, UK: Saville & Holdsworth.
- Scallan, T. Chairmain, Training Security Industry in South Africa. 2009. Personal interview. 15 June, Pretoria.
- Security Officers Act 92 of 1987. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Silverman, D. 2000. *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. London: Sage.
- Singh, A. 2008. *Policing and crime control in post-apartheid South Africa*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Steenkamp, DG & Potgieter, PJ. 2004. Private security and crime prevention: A factor analytic approach. *Acta Criminologica* 17(2):71-82.
- Strauss, A & Corbin, J. 1998. *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Teodorescu, T. 2006. Competence versus competency: What is the difference? *Performance Improvement* 45(10):27-30.
- Terre Blanche, M & Kelly, K. 2004. Interpretive methods, in *Research in practice: Applied methods for the social sciences*, edited by M Terre Blanche & K Durrheim. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press:123-172.
- Urquhart, C. 2007. The evolving nature of grounded theory method: The case of information system discipline, in *The Sage handbook of grounded theory*, edited by A Bryant & K Charmaz. London: Sage:339-359.
- Zhao, S & Du, J. 2011. The application of competency-based talent assessment in China. *Human Systems Management* 30(1/2):23-37.